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VILA RECÔNCAVO

[The Private Plantation]

The following discussion will examine one of the five private plantations in the community of Vila Recôncavo and will then describe the network of factory plantations in the same community.

The Private Plantation: Fazenda das Moças

The Fazenda das Moças ("G" on map of community) is typical of a privately owned plantation in all respects but one. Its owner is a lady who assumed active direction of the plantation after her husband's death. At first there was some difficulty in persuading the overseer of the plantation to take orders from a woman, for he felt his prestige was lowered in the eyes of the workmen as well as the overseers of neighboring plantations. However, after three or four years, Dona Sinhá, in cooperation with "Seu"[1] Paulo, the overseer, has made an outstanding success of her plantation, and the original friction between the two has greatly diminished. Below is an inventory of the Fazenda das Moças:

Extent: 930 tarefas,[2] mostly of massapê, 450 of which are under sugar-cane cultivation, the rest consisting of pasture and small gardens

Water: 4 drinking tanks for livestock
2 small freshwater streams
(Drinking water must be brought from a neighboring plantation, which has a spring well known in the area for the salubrious qualities of its water.)

Houses: 45 workers' houses
Owner's house, with living room, dining room, 4 bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, 2 maids' rooms, 2 other dependencies, veranda; surrounded by orchard
1 overseer's house
1 house formerly used as a school

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1. "Seu" is a corruption of Senhor and is a title often given to persons of some prestige.

2. The tarefa is the unit of land measurement used in Bahia. It equals 900 square braças. The braça equals 6 feet, which gives the tarefa 32,400 square feet. This is 11,160 square feet less than one acre.

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The houses are small, usually consisting of a front living room, a corridor with one or two bedrooms, a small dining room, and a kitchen. The furniture is scanty--a miscellany of chairs, benches, and tables, an occasional dish closet, the ever-present pictures of saints, one or two beds, and clay dishes.

As noted earlier, the fisherman could earn more if he wanted to. There is a certain dispraisal of those who attempt to better themselves, though once they have raised their status they are admired. One fisherman in town worked harder than the others, earning slightly more; his house was always in better condition than the others, and his wife took better care of it. She was very neat, and her house and children were always remarkably clean. This family was always ridiculed by its neighbors for trying to be like gente (literally, people, but in Vila Recôncavo carrying the special connotation of upper-class people). Life became so unpleasant for them that they finally moved away.

Class C is aware of the difference between it and the town's uppermost class and the planters. The latter constitute a very distant group to most town members of Class C, for there are almost no occasions when the two groups meet. When not pushed to a finer distinction, lower-class people usually recognize two strata--their own and a small but powerful one above them, consisting of the local upper class and planters. Color plays an important role in Class C, for it is generally acknowledged that the whiter one is, the higher in the social scale, in spite of the instances in town where dark mestiços have climbed to the top of the ladder, that is, to the top of Class B. Color is the one classifying criterion which applies to all members of Class C, since many of the other criteria, such as education and family tradition, are inapplicable. These negative considerations, plus the fact that their occupations are all manual, tend to make the group quite homogeneous except for skin color. Nevertheless, the town members of Class C consider themselves definitely superior to the field workers, regarding them as country bumpkins. There is little or no tendency for rural people to move into town, and no one remembers having heard of the marriage of a country person with a town dweller.

What has been called Class D in Vila Recôncavo is composed largely of women who have children but no acknowledged husbands. There is no such group in the rural area, because of the pressure brought to bear by the plantation own-

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and his clients are drawn largely from the élite, he is well to do financially. His wife, it is said, is envied by other white women.

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A woman of the upper class when asked if a woman's social standing declined after her marriage to a black or dark mulatto said: "This depends largely on the man. It may; but if he is cultivated and refined, it may not. A woman marrying Dr. Raul Calogeras would not lose caste."

Obviously, then, a distinction must be made between interclass and intraclass marriages. The following reasons given by whites responding affirmatively to the query, "Do you object to marrying a *preto?*" indicate that their objection was basically on class, rather than on racial, grounds:

Because *pretos* seldom have social standing.
Because they are ordinarily lower in the social scale.
Because they are usually crude and stupid.
Because they belong to a low class.
Because it would lower me.
Because I think both should be on the same social level.
Because black color usually lowers one's social position.
Because I think social equality is indispensable for marriage.

These statements all reduce perhaps to one general statement: The Negro ordinarily lacks class.

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A distinction must also be made between those individuals who are noticeably negroid and those who are *branqueados*, who have only *um pouco da raça*. As an upper-class white woman remarked: "It's different with the lighter shades. You can't easily draw the line between the pure whites and those with only *um pouco da raça*. Race mixture has now become so extensive that there wouldn't be many left to choose among." Very light mixed-bloods often marry whites without any question whatever arising. For instance, the four sons and two daughters of a fam-

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While the mixed-bloods are consistently proud of their white lineage, they (at least the ambitious ones among them) tend, as we have noted, to be ashamed of black relatives and to hide, in so far as possible, the too obvious evidence of relation to them. This ordinarily occurs when the mixed-blood has achieved some economic competence or otherwise improved his standing in the social order.

Such an attitude is not greatly dissimilar to that of an upper-class resident of New York, for example, toward his relatives among the mountaineers of Tennessee. As with all individuals who within the span of a few years have climbed from one class to another, the self-confidence and sense of superiority of the Brazilian mixed-blood are to some extent intermittently, or even constantly, threatened by feelings of insecurity. João Varella has written of some of these individuals:

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> Of his white father, whom he never saw,
> He has a picture in the parlor;
> But of the Negro woman who gave him birth
> He has no picture, nor does he even speak of her.[47]

Similarly, Gilberto Freyre has pointed out that many times in the past

there resulted from . . . . the fact that the mother or the grandmother of the house was a mulatto situations often dramatic which are reflected in certain Brazilian romances and other accounts. Fair individuals often sought to keep visitors from seeing the fat mulatto grandmother, or even mother, with her huge negroid buttocks; or kept out of sight the dark brother, or dark sister, the tira-teima"[48]

[47] From an unpublished manuscript entitled "O africano na Bahia."

[48] Elucidating this phrase, a Bahian said, "The *tira teima* is an individual who in himself constitutes a living negation of the family's claim to whiteness. Being darker, or otherwise revealing the presence of Negro blood, this individual destroys the illusion (*tira a teima*) of *fidalguia* [superior standing] which the family wishes to give out."

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